

# Exhibit 5

[2020 ELECTION](#)

## Russia's propaganda machine discovers 2020 Democratic candidate Tulsi Gabbard

Experts who track websites and social media linked to Russia have seen stirrings of a possible campaign of support for Hawaii Democrat Tulsi Gabbard.



Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-HI, speaks at a press conference on Capitol Hill on July 18, 2018. Win McNamee / Getty Images file

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**By Robert Windrem and Ben Popken**

The Russian propaganda machine that tried to influence the 2016 U.S. election is now promoting the presidential aspirations of a controversial Hawaii Democrat who earlier this month declared her intention to run for president in 2020.

An NBC News analysis of the main English-language news sites employed by Russia in its 2016 election meddling shows [Rep. Tulsi Gabbard](#) of Hawaii, who is set to make her formal announcement Saturday, has become a favorite of the sites Moscow used when it interfered in 2016.

Several experts who track websites and social media linked to the Kremlin have also seen what they believe may be the first stirrings of an upcoming Russian campaign of support for Gabbard.

Since Gabbard announced her intention to run on Jan. 11, there have been at least 20 Gabbard stories on three major Moscow-based English-language websites affiliated with or supportive of the Russian government: RT, the Russian-owned TV outlet; Sputnik News, a radio outlet; and Russia Insider, a blog that experts say closely follows the Kremlin line. The CIA has called RT and Sputnik part of "Russia's state-run propaganda machine."



### [Tulsi Gabbard announces 2020 Presidential bid](#)

JAN. 11, 2019 04:24

All three sites celebrated Gabbard's announcement, defended her positions on Russia and her 2017 meeting with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, and attacked those who have suggested she is a pawn for Moscow. The coverage devoted to Gabbard, both in news and commentary, exceeds that afforded to any of the declared or rumored Democratic candidates despite Gabbard's lack of voter recognition.

Gabbard was mentioned on the three sites about twice as often as two of the best known Democratic possibilities for 2020, Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, each with 10 stories. Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren had fewer. In each case, the other contenders were treated more critically than Gabbard, with headlines like "'Don't Run': Vermont Paper Begs Bernie Sanders Not to Seek US Presidency in 2020" and "Sexist much? Biden blames 'conservative blonde woman' for shutdown, 'forgets' Ann Coulter's name."

"Her promulgation of positions compatible with Russian geo strategic interests can help them mainstream such discussion in the [Democratic] party," said Alex Stamos, former chief security officer at Facebook and now an NBC News analyst. Gabbard, said Stamos, helps them with all their "lines of attack."



"Will Tulsi Gabbard Shake Up the 2020 Democratic Primary?" by Sputnik News. Sputnik News

A major in the Hawaii Army National Guard who served two tours in Iraq, Gabbard was first elected to Congress in 2012 and represents the out islands and northern Oahu. She attracted attention as a maverick when she resigned as Democratic National Committee vice chair in early 2016 and endorsed Bernie Sanders. She gave his nominating speech at that summer's party convention.

While some of her stances appeal to the left, she has also angered the party's liberal base with her past positions [on same sex marriage](#), abortion and guns. Just weeks after Donald Trump's upset victory over Hillary Clinton, [she met with the president-elect](#) at Trump Tower.

But Gabbard's most controversial position and the one where she's most in line with Russian interests is on Syria. She's accused the U.S. of pushing a policy of "regime change" wars and in January 2017, [she met with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in Syria](#) on what she called a "fact-finding mission."

RT began defending Gabbard as soon as she announced. A behavioral science expert who studies social media tweeted out a vow on Jan. 11 to start a GoFundMe campaign to finance a reporting trip to Gabbard's Hawaii district. Reporters for RT's television network pounced, calling it "an investigative vacation" and a "beachside investigation" by an "establishment Democrat."



On Jan. 12, the day after Gabbard announced, RT headlined her decision this way: "'Putin puppet' vs 'Assad shill': Dems & Reps unite in panic over Gabbard challenging Trump in 2020."

The unsigned article claimed, "With Representative Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) entering the 2020 presidential fray, establishment figures on both Right and Left are scrambling to smear the anti-war congresswoman with impeccable identity-politics bona fides. Ever since her 2017 visit to Syria, Gabbard has been condemned for daring to seek firsthand accounts rather than blindly trusting the MSM narrative, so on Friday the pundits were again off to the races, with fresh accusations of Assad-sympathizing."

On Jan. 16, Lee Stranahan, one of the co-hosts on "Fault Line," a Washington-based program on Sputnik News, admitted that the debates should be the focus for Gabbard.

"The significant thing about her being in the race is because one of her main issues is peace and specifically on Syria, where she is telling the truth on Syria," said Stranahan, who joined Sputnik after stints at Breitbart News, the right-wing news site. "I think she is going to change the debate. If she can get through the first few months, and make it to actual debates, is there a big millionaire or billionaire that will support Tulsi Gabbard."



"Not-so-warm Welcome" by RT. RT via YouTube



The same day, conservative writer Hunter Derensis noted on Russia Insider, "In line with her thinking on Syria, she lacks the anti-Russian stance of other Democratic politicians. 'How does going to war with Russia over Syria serve the interest of the American people?' she mentioned in a tweet. Gabbard has also supported Trump's diplomatic summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in one of her multiple appearances with Tucker Carlson."

That story was headlined, "Heroic Tulsi Gabbard Will Run on Her Sensible Foreign Policy. Expect Democrats, Faux Progressives to Squeal."

In articles on the Russian sites, Gabbard is described as a "rebel," who is "straight-talking" and a "heroic" candidate who will "shake up" the establishment.

Coverage of other Democratic presidential hopefuls in pro-Kremlin media has been for the most part perfunctory, limited to candidates' announcements or summaries of their relative prospects. In recent weeks, Sputnik has poked fun at Elizabeth Warren's beer commercial and a widely circulated photo of Beto O'Rourke's in a dentist chair.

Erika Tsuji, a spokeswoman for Gabbard, said it as "ridiculous" to suggest the Russians supported her candidacy.

"Russia would never overtly support a candidate they wanted to help, because it would just hurt their candidacy," said Tsuji. "It's common sense."

Tsuji also said that "From the start, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard has denounced Russia's attempts to muddle (sic) in our elections and will continue to do so." She noted that Gabbard had cosponsored legislation calling for an independent investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election, cosponsored a bill prohibiting foreign influence in the election process, and sponsored a bill to protect election infrastructure from hackers.

### [The race for 2020](#)

Experts in Russian on-line propaganda say Gabbard appeals to pro-Russian sites because her positions –and her appeal as an outsider in her own party – can be used to create division among Democrats.

Former FBI agent Clint Watts, author of "Messing with the Enemy: Surviving in a Social Media World of Hackers, Terrorists, Russians, and Fake News," said Gabbard has past or present positions on several issues that would be attractive to the Russian propaganda machine, and she is already popular with the U.S. "alt-left." Besides her views on Syria, she responded to reports of Russian interference in the 2016 election by saying the U.S. had interfered in foreign elections too.

The language used to laud Gabbard is reminiscent of [Russian media promotion of Jill Stein](#), the U.S. Green Party candidate for president in 2012 and 2016. [Stein received favorable coverage](#) from the same outlets and also benefited from Russian troll accounts.



Jill Stein at the National Press Club in Washington on June 23, 2015. Drew Angerer / Getty Images file

Watts notes the difference between Stein and Gabbard is that Gabbard is member of Congress and part of the Democratic Party while Stein is more of a fringe figure. Watts and Stamos think the Russians may be gravitating to Gabbard not because they think she can win,

but because her positions, often in line with those of the Kremlin, will become part of the Democratic primary debates.

"They probably just spotted her and figured this is someone to promote," said Watts, who is also an NBC News analyst. "You can just see it coming. They're telegraphing what coming the next two years, which is playing in the left."

"They want someone like Gabbard to voice a Russian position. They are not telling her what to say but they want her pro-Russian positions play into the debate."

Stamos agrees that Gabbard could be used to inject pro-Russian positions into the Democratic Party's discussions and debates during primary season.

"We should expect the Russian intel services and troll farms to be active in the Democratic primary process," said Stamos, "as this provides them with the best opportunity to create the most division in American society in 2020."

The first Democratic primary is a year away, and the Russian disinformation machine has not yet initiated a full 2016-style campaign of support for any of the 2020 aspirants. In 2016, negative coverage and fabricated stories about Hillary Clinton were amplified by a huge network of fake social media accounts and bots.

Experts who track inauthentic social media accounts, however, have already found some extolling Gabbard's positions since she declared.

Within a few days of Gabbard announcing her presidential bid, [DisInfo 2018](#), part of the cybersecurity firm New Knowledge, found that three of the top 15 URLs shared by the 800 social media accounts affiliated with known and [suspected Russian propaganda operations](#) directed at U.S. citizens were about Gabbard.

Analysts at New Knowledge, the company the Senate Intelligence Committee used to track Russian activities in the 2016 election, told NBC News they've spotted "chatter" related to Gabbard in anonymous online message boards, including those known for fomenting right-wing troll campaigns. The chatter discussed Gabbard's usefulness.



"'Putin puppet' vs 'Assad shill': Dems & Reps unite in panic over Gabbard challenging Trump in 2020" by RT. RT

"A few of our analysts saw some chatter on 8chan saying she was a good 'divider' candidate to amplify," said Renee DiResta, director of research at New Knowledge.

Josh Russell, a researcher and "troll hunter" known for identifying fake accounts, similarly told NBC News he recently spotted a few clusters of suspicious accounts that retweeted the same exact text about Gabbard, mostly neutral or slightly positive headlines.

"They usually spam links to websites, but also retweet specific tweets or accounts in an effort to boost a website or accounts search results," he said.

Gabbard is expected to make the formal announcement of her candidacy on Saturday in Hawaii. On Tuesday, however, [Politico reported](#) that her campaign manager is already set to leave. Tsuji [subsequently denied to the Daily Mail that the campaign is in turmoil](#), and said Gabbard will make her announcement on Saturday as planned.

Gabbard may also have to fight to keep her House seat in heavily Democratic Hawaii. A state senator has announced he will challenge her in the primary, and a prominent liberal group has endorsed him.



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